

Psalm 4

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 14 September 2010 08:47

Like so many other Psalms, Psalm 4 is short. The very name 'Psalm' is taken from the Latin, *Psalmi*, meaning 'short'! We can trace the word back to the Greek and then to the Hebrew, *mizmor*. Interestingly, the Hebrew bible does not actually give a title to the full collection. Later, rabbinical teaching referred to the collection as *Sefer Tehillim*, or just *Tehillim*. After the exile, the section became known as 'Temple Worship'. 'Halleluja' was a liturgical refrain, heading ten Psalms as an invocation.

The number of Psalms differed in Hebrew history, but was generally set at 150; the differences mainly being about the division of verses rather than content. Thus, the divisions of the Psalms as we now have them were not known to the ancient Hebrews, who joined them together or split them up as they wished. Originally, the 'psalms' were one long text, apart from what we know as Psalm 119. Psalm 4 is one of a cluster of Psalms using the term 'neginot', explained below.

This Psalm was written by David and given to the full-time leader/director of the section of the Temple choir that played on stringed instruments. This is the definition of "*To the chief musician on Neginoth*"

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'neginoth' means 'stringed instruments' (usually accompanied by songs). A variety of stringed instruments were used in worship. David gave the song to him so that the choir would follow his directions: various rabbinical commentators interpret the term 'chief musician' as 'precentor'. Therefore, we know that in this particular case the Psalm was to be sung, accompanied by instrumental, stringed music, using a far more complex system of music than we have today.

David is telling God that though enemies are always ready to attack him, God holds him dear and protects him. Very clearly, in this text, we see that the key to help is not our own actions, but God's response to our obedience to, and trust in, Him. Only the slightest of doubts is enough to cast us onto a path of fear and lack of peace. Our faith is all or nothing!

Verses 1&2

1.

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

2.

O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and

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seek after leasing? Selah.

When David says “Hear me when I call”, it is not a mere hope or a possibility. It is a sure statement, meaning ‘to answer’ or ‘to respond’. When David ‘calls’ it means to cry out loudly to God. So, when David is attacked or is under immense strain from enemies or situations, he calls out to God – and God hears and responds.

In our own day, few Christians really trust that God will respond! They might *claim* they trust, but their actions and thinking precludes any answer by God. Their faith is no faith... so there is no answer. There are times when God will answer even if our faith is next to nothing – but this is rare, not a rule. Normally, He requires us to call out in complete trust in His answer. Thus, if there is no answer... do we have genuine faith? Are we righteous? After all, David says He is the “God of our righteousness”, the Elohiym of what is just and right, of our deliverance and victory.

When David was in dire straits or under attack, and so pushing David into a corner, God “enlarged” him, by removing the feeling of being hemmed-in, making room for David to know God’s protection and help. It also means to open the heart for instruction, a necessary condition if we are to hear God’s word to our souls.

David recognises that any answer to prayer is of God’s mercy, and unmerited. If God chooses to answer it is not because we have a right to such an answer, but because God has promised and will answer because He wishes to. It is a favour given to us because God wishes to help.

If we delve deeper into this, we can say that because everything is known to God in eternity, as are His many ways of answering, that God’s wish to help is foreordained and must occur! Our pleas in prayer must be associated with His eternal plan, and must be right in His eyes before He will answer. In this way, both the prayer and the answer are one unit, and an answer requires a pure prayer, one prompted by God.

At the start of verse one ‘hear’ is **‘*anah***, a verb that includes the idea of a response. The word ‘hear’ at the end of the same verse is a masculine noun, a verb,

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shama'

, that speaks of the actual activity of hearing. It is a request by David for God to listen to His prayers. In this way, though David makes a positive statement – that God WILL hear – he thereby acknowledges that the decision to listen is God's alone, and the way we pray and the content, etc., have no real bearing on whether or not God answers and cares for the one praying. In other words, it is 'all of grace'.

Though the term 'prayer' can mean a hymn or sacred song, here it refers to an entreaty to God by one requiring a direct response. Such a prayer is not like an essay, where we range our wishes in a list and present them to a reader. These prayers are genuine, heart-felt, and, if necessary, borne on the back of tears.

David turns to his enemies and rhetorically asks how much longer they will determine to bring his name, reputation and honour, down to the dust. Their attacks and disdain brought disgrace upon his kingship, being an insult to His Lord. Behind this disgrace is the desire to humiliate their prey, kalam. This is how modern enemies of Christ work – they heap shame and humiliation on all who dare to follow Him, in the hope that it will cause them to hide away or stop their witness. Remember that though we might feel humiliated, their attacks are really aimed at God, and He will take revenge.

The king adds: "How long will ye love vanity?" The word 'love' is not as we know it, for it means, in this text, to desire after something. In this case, vanity. Vanity is emptiness, something worthless, without proper use. Today, almost all pursuits of men are vain and have no worth at all. They are fruitless and should not be allowed to exist. For Christians, vanity is deadly, ruining their spiritual life. What are you watching, listening to, thinking about, or doing, that has no worth? Then stop it, because it distracts you from what is pure and holy, and prevents you from living in a way pleasing to God. And when that happens do not expect answers to prayer.

How long, too, will David's enemies "*seek after leasing?*" Again, to seek in this context is to hunger after, or to desire after something. Here, they seek after "*leasing*"

kazab

. That is, lying, being false, deceiving. Mainly, this text refers to idols and the false hopes they engender. One can live an entire life in falsity, especially if he follows a false god, an idol, which is a deception.

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ALL religions, except for the belief in the Lord as found in scripture, are false. It does not matter how 'advanced' they are, or how accepted, or how worldwide – if it is not faith in God, it is false, and so worthless. And, being worthless, it is not allowable to treat it with dignity, or respect. If we do not treat the devil with respect, why should we treat a false religion with respect? To do so would be to give it credibility and worth... and this we must never do. Today, we hear many calls to 'respect' this or that false religion. It is not possible for us to do so, for the false religion dishonours and blasphemes the Lord.

Verses 3&4

1.

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.

2.

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

David now makes an assertion – that God has special care for those who are godly. Really, this ought to be self-evident, but how many truly live in godly fashion? Very few. In my own life I was told many times in churches that I was “*over the top*” because I believed every word of scripture and said we must live by it! This is very similar to the unbelieving psychiatric belief that reading too much scripture can cause one to become mentally unhinged! It is still an axiom in psychiatry, which is secular.

God “*hath set apart him*”. Does this mean God did so after the man became godly? No: it means the man became godly because the Holy Spirit led him to be so, and the Spirit did this because it was already in God's eternal plan. Otherwise we are saying that God does not know a man will become holy, but when He notices it, He rewards him for being faithful! In other words, it is 'works' and not 'grace'.

The person is 'set apart', ***palah***, distinguished from all others, marked out. This is done by the Lord. In this verse, instead of ***Elohiym***, 'Lord' is Jehovah, which is the proper name of God. The godly man was not set apart by any other name but the one true God. This is to be fully understood, ***yada'***

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, and known by all who would have God's favour. It is not an elite band who have this favour but everyone who is saved! But, every saved person MUST be godly, despite the sometimes overwhelming desire to sin, or the onset of attacks and adverse circumstances.

You will notice in the text that it is God Who sets apart such a person ('him' also includes 'her'). He sets the person apart *"for himself"*. The one condition for this special favour is that the person must be *"godly"*, **chaciyd**. What is this? It means to possess all the attributes of God that are possible in human beings... piety, kindness, faithfulness, mercy. It is to live in such a way as to reflect God and His character. It is to display excellence in every part of our being and to show graciousness.

It also includes – much to the shock of many – a hatred for sin and for all things that promote it. As I have said many times before, we may NOT accept, allow, or promote, what God hates or rejects. Those who live godly lives are holy and will not be ashamed to be called 'saints'.

It might sound odd, but the root, **chacad**, teaches us to be kind to *ourselves*, too. How many of us, after we have sinned, or have made genuine errors, continue to chastise ourselves, or be ashamed, even if we have repented and changed? This kindness to one's self includes kindness towards others.

God uses such a godly person for His own purposes. If you live a godly life and are drawn to His service it is because that is what God has in store for you. He will lead you along the path of ministry, whatever it is. The colon before the phrase *"the LORD will hear when I call unto him"* implies that the phrase is connected to the previous one, and explains it. Thus, God will hear our pleas and respond to them, if we are godly. These are cries of anguish, but made to a God we *know*

will respond. If we cry out but do not really think He will reply, then He will not. Our faith must be absolute. This is because, as a similar root word suggests, we have met the One we call out to. Have you truly met God? Then you will confidently call out, knowing He is there.

David tells us to therefore *"stand in awe"*. How awful charismatics are, who insist on referring to God the Father as 'Daddy'! This is over-familiarity showing contempt. It is certainly not standing in awe. This *"awe"*, **ragaz**, is not just a vague idea of His greatness: it means to tremble and quake in His presence; and yet to be excited by it. I always advise students to have this awe, to know the fear of the Lord, because it is the proper

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stance before One Who can crush or elevate us at will. And, if we really believe and have this fear, we will not sin!

When we have this real and vibrant relationship with God, we will speak to ourselves and our innermost being when we go to bed, balancing one holy thing against another, and we will be able to sleep well. It does not necessarily mean our enemies have gone away; but it means we have supreme trust, faith, in God, and know He will deal with them. So, we rest peacefully.

Note that at points David uses the term 'Selah'. It is sometimes used to mean 'so be it'. However, its real meaning, a musical one, denotes a pause (or, silence) in the singing, though the music continues. It is a way of adding emphasis.

Verses 5-8

1.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

2.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

3.

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

4.

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

We must obey God/be godly before He listens to our prayers. And we must "*offer the sacrifices of righteousness*" when we place our trust in Him. This seems to be an odd way to put it – so how do we offer

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'sacrifices of righteousness'?

Righteousness, *tsedeq*, is rightness with God. But, it is far more than that. It also includes justice, decent and right speech, acting properly (purely), and even prosperity. It is based on the verb, *tsadaq*, meaning to be in the right and to live a life of exemplary character and conduct, no matter what the provocation is. It means to bring justice to situations and thus to be justified in what one does. "Sacrifices", *zebach*, refers to a solemn offering and to slaughter in divine judgment, *zabach*.

Overall, it simply means an individual offers his life to God as a sign of total faith, thereby killing his own desires. Both 'offer' and 'sacrifices' are really the same thing – one being the verb of the noun. Thus – we must give God our righteousness, which is something He requires anyway. When we do this we may properly put our trust in God (Jehovah).

"Trust", *batach*, is to have complete confidence in God and to be secure in that trust (another term for 'faith'); and when we have this trust we will be bold, caring nothing for the world and its woes or enemies. Are you bold in ministry and life? Or, do you continually apologise for your forthrightness (if, that is, you are forthright)? It is very hard to have trust in God if we live without obeying Him, and it is very hard to be bold before the world if we do not put our complete trust in Him. Do you understand this?

Enemies taunt us and ask who on this earth will do us good, and be our friend. The answer is – none. Our only true friend and protection, doing us good, is God. That is why David calls upon God to shine His countenance upon "us" – not just David but all who honour the Lord. '*Paniym*' indicates that the light comes from His face, which is turned towards us in approval.

When enemies came at me, wave after wave, my concern was not my own demise, but that if the enemies won, then God's name would be lowered to the dirt. This is because my demise would 'prove' to the enemies that I was lost and my cause was wrong. Thus it was that God did not allow me to be destroyed, but kept me upheld and protected, disproving the claim of my enemies. He shone the light of His countenance upon me!

This has more of an effect than anything else, for it puts gladness into the heart, a joy that fills the soul as God shows you that your cause is right and your life is indeed holy. Yes, evil men

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will know financial gain and power in the world, but God's care will be far greater towards His people, outshining any meagre gain of the world.

David will lay down at night, at peace with himself and with God, and so will sleep. A guilty conscience will not allow us to sleep, or anxiety about things we cannot change, and non-reliance on God. When we lay down assured of God's grace and mercy, knowing we are living holy lives, God will help us to live in safety. Not the safety of the world but of His grace. As I have explained it to others – it is like looking down from the heavens, watching everything going on, amidst the sins and carnage of wicked people, and somehow being detached from it all by God's providence.

A special [supplementary note on guidance, God's will and prayer](#) was written following the bible study meeting at Manselton Church.

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